
California Farmland Conservancy Program

Focus on Farmland



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Newsletter of the CFCP
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This edition of Focus on Farmland features:

- CFCP Grants in Fall River Valley and Napa County
 - California Council of Land Trusts Inaugural Conference
 - Legislative, Budget and Funding Updates
 - Upcoming Events
-

CFCP Funds Easement in the Fall River Valley

The picturesque Fall River Valley is located 70 miles northeast of Redding in Shasta County. With its scenic vistas, thriving agricultural economy, abundant wildlife and world-class native rainbow trout fishery, the Fall River Valley is experiencing increasing fragmentation as vacation homes are being built on small lots. To preserve the valley, a collaboration spearheaded by the Conservation Fund and the McConnell Foundation and including the Fall River Resource Conservation District, Shasta Land Trust, and the Department of Fish and Game, has embarked on an ambitious program to protect 20,000 acres. The program aims to protect both the agricultural and tourist economies of the Fall River Valley by acquiring conservation easements.

The first agricultural conservation easement in the valley was purchased in January on the 1,467-acre River Ranch. The easement is held by Shasta Land Trust. River Ranch has over 1,200 acres of prime farmland

currently producing alfalfa, alfalfa grass, timothy hay and wild rice. Prather Ranch leases the irrigated pastureland to raise cattle for the production of collagen for human pharmaceutical purposes. The natural beef is sold at farmers markets, grocery stores and restaurants.

In addition to permanently protecting the ranch's agricultural values, the easement will protect water quality, wildlife, and aquatic habitat. River Ranch contains three miles of Fall River frontage, and the cultivation of crops offers additional benefits to waterfowl and wildlife.

The easement was purchased with \$973,500 in funding from the California Farmland Conservancy Program, \$970,500 from the federal Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program, and \$153,000 from the Department of Fish and Game's Wildlife Conservation Board. The McConnell Foundation, The Conservation Fund, and the landowner all contributed towards associated costs.



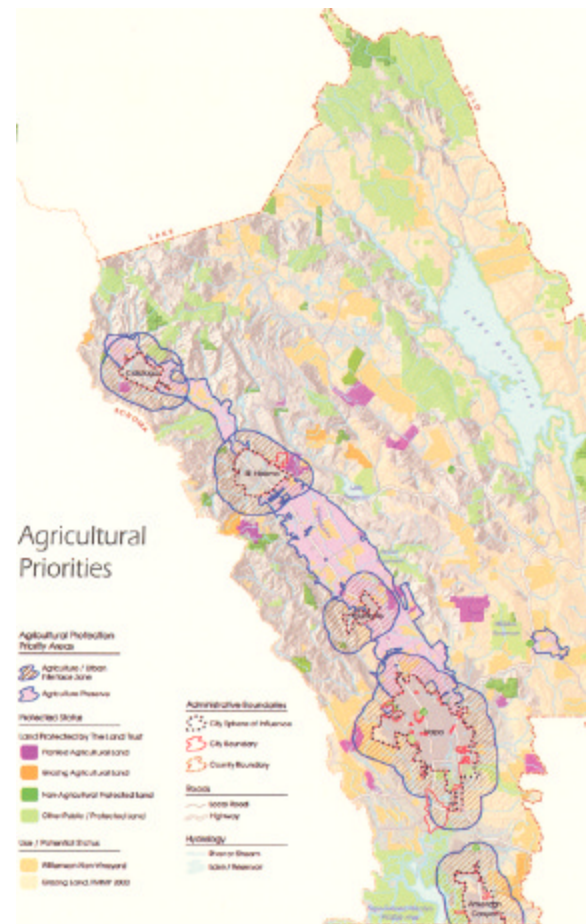
River Ranch in the Fall River Valley, Shasta County. Photo by Marlys Barbosa.

Napa Land Trust Completes Planning Grant Funded by CFCP

The Land Trust of Napa County has successfully wrapped up a two-year planning grant with funding from the California Farmland Conservancy Program. Building upon an earlier CFCP grant, this planning grant had two primary objectives. First, the land trust developed an Agricultural Lands Conservation Assessment to evaluate its current agricultural easement program and to develop recommendations for its improvement. To this end, the land trust hired consultants to hold numerous focus groups, interviews and meetings and to develop Geographic Information Systems (GIS) maps. The assessment, which was published in 2003, has been incorporated into the land trust's long-range strategic plan and will continue to guide the land trust's agricultural land preservation efforts through at least 2010.

The second objective of the planning grant was to obtain at least three donated agricultural conservation easements based upon recommendations from the assessment. In all, the land trust acquired four donated easements from two different landowners. One of the easements permanently protects a 44-acre vineyard owned by Beckstoffer Vineyards in the Carneros region. The other three collectively protect 89 acres owned by Stag's Leap Wine Cellars. All of these easements prohibit homesite and winery development, thereby helping to permanently protect Napa County's agricultural land and scenic landscapes.

The Land Trust of Napa County's mission is to protect Napa County's most important open space and agricultural lands as well as to preserve its most significant natural systems. The land trust works with private landowners to protect their lands by accepting fee title donations, creating conservation easements, and assisting with acquisitions to be transferred to a governmental agency or nonprofit organization. Since its founding in 1976, the land trust has completed over 100 transactions, permanently protecting over 33,000 acres in Napa County. Of these projects, nearly 10,000 acres have some component of cultivated agricultural land, which will remain forever available for agricultural use. For more information about the Land Trust of Napa County visit www.napalandtrust.org.



Agricultural priority areas in the Napa Valley, part of a recent planning effort completed by the Land Trust of Napa County.

California Council of Land Trusts Holds Inaugural Conference

With 62 land trusts as founding members, the newly formed California Council of Land Trusts (CCLT) held its inaugural conference on March 8 in Sacramento. More than 220 individuals attended the conference, making it the biggest land trust gathering in California history. Darla Guenzler, CCLT's executive director, said, "This is a proud and happy day, beyond our wildest dreams and hopes."

Guenzler introduced the CCLT agenda, which is to develop financial resources to help meet the needs of land trusts, to help build a positive policy and legal climate for land protection and stewardship, to promote land trusts to key constituents, and to facilitate communication within the land trust community. She stated that CCLT must craft a careful message that land trusts are essential to Californians, and highlight the tangible benefits that land trusts provide to local communities. CCLT will develop a long-term strategy

that will include identifying basic facts about land trusts, such as how many there are and how much land has been protected by land trusts throughout California.

At the conference, speakers included former assemblyman Fred Keeley, Secretary for Resources Mike Chrisman, Walter Moore of the Peninsula Open Space Trust and Daniel Silverman of Fenton Communications. Awards were presented to Assemblymen John Laird (D-Santa Cruz) and Tim Leslie (R-Tahoe City), and to Governor Schwarzenegger for their leadership in creating the Sierra Nevada Conservancy. Presenters from six regions around California highlighted the work of the land trusts in their area through beautiful slide show presentations.

Rand Wentworth, president of the Land Trust Alliance (LTA), reported on current national threats and opportunities for land trust work. In response to negative press regarding certain transactions, conservation efforts throughout the country are under scrutiny by Congress and the IRS. One item of grave concern is the recent proposal by a Congressional committee to drastically cut tax benefits for donations of conservation easements. Wentworth stated that reform is inevitable at the federal level, and activism on the part of land trusts can help determine what shape it takes. Wentworth mentioned that LTA is also working on the possibility of developing an accreditation program for land trusts in order to develop more uniform professionalism in the field.

Legislative Updates

The 2005-06 legislative session has commenced with its usual wide array of proposed legislation. Below are some of the bills introduced that may affect agricultural and other land conservation. For more information, on these or any other bills, visit the Legislature's bill information website at www.leginfo.ca.gov.

SB 695 (Kehoe). Identifies legislative intent to establish a central, public registry of conservation easements.

SB 153 (Chesbro et al). Proposes the California Clean Water, Clean Air, Safe Neighborhood Parks, and Coastal Protection Act of 2006, which, if enacted, would be submitted to voters in the 2006 statewide primary election. SB 153 proposes \$3.0 billion in bond funding for a variety of conservation purposes, providing \$75 million for conservation of agricultural lands and grazing lands, including oak woodlands and grasslands.

SB 863 (Florez and Perata). Proposes the California Clean Air Bond Act, a \$5.15 billion bond measure, for the purpose of funding air quality programs in California. This bill, if enacted, would be submitted to voters in the November 2006 general election. SB 863 proposes \$250 million for the Williamson Act and California Farmland Conservancy Programs, encouraging the preservation of agricultural and open space lands as a means of limiting air pollution.

SB 200 (Machado). Proposes a Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta Conservancy Program for the stated purpose of restoring, enhancing and protecting the agricultural, natural, cultural and recreational resources within the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta.

Governor's 2005-06 Budget and Farmland Conservation

The Administration's proposed 2005-06 Budget released in January includes \$15 million in grant funding available through the California Farmland Conservancy Program. Proposed funding is from Proposition 40: the California Clean Water, Clean Air, Safe Neighborhood Parks, and Coastal Protection Act of 2002. If this funding is included within the final 2005-06 Budget, funds will be made available through the CFCP's ongoing Request for Grant Applications process.

The Wildlife Conservation Board's Natural Heritage Preservation Tax Credit Act

The Wildlife Conservation Board has administered the Natural Heritage Preservation Tax Credit Act since 2001. The Act allows landowners to receive tax credits equal to up to 55 percent of the fair market value of qualified donated interests in land, including agricultural conservation easements. The Act authorized up to \$100 million in tax credits for donations of qualified land, and \$33 million has been used to date. Recent legislation (AB 2722, Chapter 715/2004) authorizes these tax credits to be paid for by the transfer of certain bond funds rather than drawing directly from the General Fund. For additional information on this program, contact Marilyn Cundiff at the Wildlife Conservation Board at mcundiff@wcb.ca.gov.

CFCP Updates

CFCP Welcomes New Student Intern: The CFCP is pleased to have Virginia Humphreys join our team. Virginia is currently a student at San Francisco State University. She is scheduled to graduate in May with a degree in geography and concentration in resource management. She will be assisting with a number of projects with the CFCP, including helping to manage planning grants.



Virginia Humphreys

Annual Monitoring Reports Due to CFCP by June 30: For organizations holding easements acquired with CFCP funding, annual monitoring reports are due by June 30. A one-page letter describing the method of monitoring and the condition of the property is sufficient.

Upcoming Events

The **Great Valley Center** is holding its annual conference on **May 11-12** in Sacramento. Titled "Our Place in the World, Growing a Community," the conference will feature more than 50 interactive sessions, including agricultural topics. For a brochure, visit www.greatvalley.org or call 209-522-5103.

The **Bay Area Open Space Council's** Seventh Annual Regional Open Space Conference will be held **May 13** in San Francisco. The conference will cover topics related to the protection and enjoyment of parks, natural habitats and agricultural open spaces in the San Francisco Bay Area. For more information, visit www.openspacecouncil.org or call 707-568-7251.

We hope you've found this issue of *Focus on Farmland* useful and informative. Please contact us with any questions or ideas you have for future editions. Feel free to forward this email to other interested parties.

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